

## **DNR Wild Rice Advisory Committee Meeting**

**6/19/18**

### **Rhineland DNR Service Center**

**Attendance:** Jason Fleener (DNR), Kevin Gauthier (DNR), Andy Chikowski (WWF), Rick Olson (WCC), Peter David (GLIFWC), Jane Severt (WCFA), Ryan Magana (DNR), Jenna Kosnicki (DNR), Keith Patrick (DNR), David Walz (DNR), Jon Simonsen (DNR), James Yach (DNR)

Meeting began at 10:00 a.m.

#### **Agenda Repair Items:**

- Include update on DNR's Aquatic Plant Management Strategic Analysis
- Include a recap of last season's statewide harvest report
- Discuss recent flooding event across the north and impacts to wild rice waters

Introduction from James Yach, Secretary's Director from Northern District, and new sponsor to the Wild Rice Advisory Committee. James briefly went over the committee protocols and role it plays to the Department.

#### **Recap of 2017 wild rice harvest – Peter David:**

- Overall another poor harvest season in 2017 that followed a poor 2016 season
- Lakes in the northwest were closer to average and fared better than lakes farther east
- 50% of harvest (pounds) reported through surveys came from 4 lakes
- Only 60 waters with rice harvest were identified in surveys (average = 92)

One of biggest problems with harvest data is missing the 65+ age cohort who are not required to purchase a wild rice harvest license. Anecdotally, it is believed that many current harvesters are from this generation. It is difficult to estimate an actual statewide harvest when we are missing data from these ricers.

#### **Potential solutions discussed:**

- Amend state statutes to also require persons age 65+ to purchase a harvest license or at least obtain a free harvest license/permit s 29.607(3). This would require legislation. Advocacy would have to happen outside of DNR.
- Retain licensed harvester demographic and address data and continue to mail surveys to people after they turn 65 assuming they will continue to harvest.

#### **Update on Wild Rice Strategic Analysis (SA) – Jon Simonsen & James Yach**

- James provided a summary of the progress being made by the department, and the importance of this effort.
- When SA draft has been prepared by the Department's writing team, it will be made available to tribes and the Wild Rice Advisory Committee for review and comment. After that, the draft will be refined and released for public comment.

- SA will form the building blocks of an eventual DNR statewide wild rice management plan. Stakeholders mentioned the importance of working closely with the tribes on management plan and utilize the products that were being produced by the Joint Committee.
- Elements mentioned to include in the SA: climate impacts, goose herbivory, public opinions.

#### Update on the Aquatic Plant Management Strategic Analysis (SA) – Kevin Gauthier

- Being coordinated through the DNR's Water Quality Program
- Currently in draft form...farther ahead than the Wild Rice SA
- Heavily driven by invasive species issues
- Question if water quality standards will be incorporated?
- Question if APM SA could be shared with Wild Rice Advisory Committee before it is sent out to the public? James said to defer to Carroll Schall, but we could look in to it.

#### DNR Wetland Infrastructure Inventory Project – Jason Fleener

- DNR is currently undergoing an inventory of all DNR managed wetland and water control infrastructure across the state.
- Managers across 5 bureaus have completed surveys on approximately 1,100 impoundments across the state.
- The data gathered will be instrumental in helping the department prioritize the utilization of limited resources into the future and improve efficiency.
- There will be opportunities in the future to engage stakeholder groups to gather feedback.
- The presence of wild rice will be included in the criteria to help prioritize future investments.

#### Lunch - offsite

#### Date Regulation of Wild Rice Lakes – Peter David and Jason Fleener

- Peter provided background history of date-regulation on wild rice lakes.
- Date regulated lakes are consistent between state admin. code and Chippewa model code.
- Current list of date regulated lakes has been unchanged for several years and contains many historic rice waters where rice is no longer present or in very low abundance. Other issues with the waters on the list include lakes that are on tribal reservations, and referenced names of lakes that do not match any current accounts of named lakes.
- Peter mentioned a majority of the lakes on the list could be removed from date-regulation, but a few of the top wild rice waters could be added (e.g. Pacwawong, Chippewa L., Island Lake) due to their popularity and need to protect against pre-mature harvest attempts.
- Pacwawong is often referenced as a lake, but could be challenged as a widening of the Namekagon River. Regardless, the St. Croix Scenic Riverway would own rights to the riverbed, a public agency that would allow harvest of rice.
- If changes are sought to modify list of lakes in Ch. NR 19.09, the rule making process would take at least a couple years. Rule could go through the Congress as a DNR Advisory spring hearing question(s). Different packages could be proposed (removing vs. adding lakes).
- Advisory committee would be the starting point to recommend which lakes should be added/removed to the Department.

- Peter referenced ss NR. 29.607 (2) – Powers of the Department, which allows the DNR Secretary to designate opening harvest dates for wild rice waters, and questioned if that language would enable the posting of any lakes that are currently not listed in administrative code.
- Committee members and tribes are interested in moving forward with review of the date regulation list through NR 19.09(4) and the equivalent tribal model code. Parallel processes would best occur with the tribes and state to review and adopt changes in codes. Final products should be consistent.
- Individual tribes will need to offer their recommendations to the Joint Wild Rice Management Committee. Peter will be in contact with these tribes.
- Action - Consultation with DNR attorney needed to figure out what steps should be taken to navigate the process.

#### Site-specific Wild Rice Updates:

- Radigan Flowage – Douglas County: Has been a good consistent producer of wild rice in the past. Dam was breached during the June flood event (10+ inches of rain). Dam is owned by the Town of Dairyland. There will be interest in repairing the dam for the sake of wild rice.
- Cranberry Creek Flowage (Douglas Co.): Another dam that breached during the flood. However, little to no rice has been documented in the past.
- Crex Refuge Extension Pool – Within the refuge at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area (Burnett Co.): It was noted that the DNR is currently undergoing a review of all wildlife refuges in Ch. NR 15. Current rules prohibit hunting in the refuge year-round, and closed no entry for any purpose between Sept. 1 – Dec. 31. It was noted that DNR managers may entertain option of opening the refuge for non-hunting purposes, including rice harvest after Sept. 1 (Note – Following the meeting, a correction was noted that it was not the intent of local DNR managers to allow entry for any purpose after Sept. 1, and that the refuge status should be retained as is).
- St. Louis River Estuary Project (Douglas Co.): A few years of seeding has taken place. High water on the river and goose herbivory have been apparent challenges in the restoration of wild rice. Exclosure studies have demonstrated the effects of goose herbivory.
- Spur Lake (Oneida Co.): Continued study and restoration work of the downstream outlet are ongoing to determine if improved hydrology could lead to the lowering of Spur Lake water levels, thus improving rice. Permission has been granted from a downstream landowner to dredge obstructions in part of the stream channel. APHIS beaver trapping contract is ongoing to continue to remove beaver and dams.
- Lower Steve Creek Flowage (Price Co.): Spillway is in need of renovation and dike may need to be reconstructed as well. DNR has the renovation planned with Pitman-Robertson (PR) money. Feasibility study needs to be done to determine the extent of the repairs needed.
- Gile Flowage sub-impoundment (Iron Co.): Dam is located within a town road and is owned by the township. The Town has applied and been awarded a dam removal grant to remove the dam, due to liability concerns and long-term costs associated with maintenance. DNR issuing the grant, and dam permit have been in consultation with GLIFWC regarding the matter. This was a seeded wild rice water that has historically has relatively small wild rice beds, but has not produced in recent years due to high water management of the Gile Flowage, backing-up into the sub-impoundment.

- Upper Nine-Mile Flowage (Vilas Co.): Flowage still drained after a few years of a beaver dam blowing out. WVIC owns land at outlet and won't allow a dam to be rebuilt. Partners have gotten together to seek solutions for new land ownership or a rebuilding of the dam, but no solutions have been deemed feasible between DNR, WVIC, the USFS, or other partners.

#### Motor Usage Conflicts in Wild Rice Beds – Jason Fleener

- This has been a recurring issue where duck hunters, anglers and boaters have reportedly indiscriminately torn-up wild rice beds with motor props. There are no laws that prohibit this activity, unless it can be proven that someone is intentionally trying to mechanically destroy wild rice plants. Local boating ordinances could help, but don't really get at the root of the issue. Site-specific boat launch postings can be done on notoriously problematic lakes. DNR is looking into communications efforts that would bring awareness to the issue.

#### Wild Rice Harvesting Field Trip – Jason Fleener

- We would like to host a field trip this fall for committee members to harvest wild rice. The field trip will be an effort to bring awareness and appreciation of the harvest of wild rice, particularly for those who have not harvested before.
- Jason has been in contact with committee member, Tracy Hames (WWA), who mentioned he could get access to harvest on the Rhinelander Flowage, a private wild rice bed, through the permission of the Eshelman Family. A condition would be that the rice harvested would be donated to a local food bank.
- Jason offered to send out a Doodle poll to committee members to determine the best date for the trip in September. Committee members present indicated that a weekday would be preferred.
- Jason will work with Peter and Tracy to round up equipment necessary for the harvest (canoes, push-poles, sticks, etc.), but other committee members are encouraged to bring these items if they have them.

Public Comments – No members of the public were present during the meeting.

Meeting adjourned